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"You just have to go for it and try, because you never know what's going to happen."

— Dinah Lachney



Special to The Clarion-Ledger

Dinah Lachney, 25, is trying to make it into the big leagues with her third *American Idol* tryout in Dallas today.

Auditioning for the dream of a lifetime

By LaReeca Rucker
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Dinah Lachney, 25, and her husband, Rick, have remodeled a home in Dectaur, where they'll move when

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Randy and Simon's attention after auditioning today in Dallas for a chance to become the next American Idol.

she graduates from Mississippi State University in December.

Lachney plans to teach at nearby Neshoba Central Elementary School, but her plans could be put on hold if she catches Paula,

Lachney is one of three Mississippians who believe their third try may lead to a spot on the popular Fox show that will air in January.

Thanks to Season 7 auditions held throughout the summer in seven national locations, Dinah Lachney, Shad Green and Rob Mortimer have the same opportunity as Kelly Clarkson, Ruben Studdard and Jordin Sparks to potentially become household names.

Dinah Lachney

Lachney was motivated to audition two previous times by the prospect of being a small-town girl plucked from obscurity who makes it big sharing her talent with the world.

Her first try was in Greensboro, N.C., for the Season 5 show that con-

cluded with Taylor Hicks' win. Lachney didn't make it past the first round, but momentarily befriended Kellie Pickler, who became an *American Idol* finalist and launched her country music career on the show.

Last year, Lachney traveled to Birmingham and advanced to the second round, where she met *American Idol* producer Nigel Lythgoe and host Ryan Seacrest. She sang Christina Aguilera's *Reflection* and was told her song wasn't memorable, so this year, she'll sing Queen's *The Show Must Go On*, hoping the selection is deemed unique.

"I feel like it needs to be a song that everyone else won't sing that you can make your own," she says.

As the daughter of a Baptist minis-

See 'IDOL', 7B

'Idol': 'It ended quicker than it started'

From 6B

ter, Lachney grew up singing in the church choir, but didn't decide to go solo until college.

That may be because of Vicki Blaylock, a vocal music instructor at East Central Community College who describes her former student as a lyric soprano with a "phenomenal" voice.

"She will be one to watch," Blaylock says. "I'm a 25-year veteran music teacher, and Dinah is one of the most exceptional voices that has come through my studio."

A longtime *American Idol* fan, Blaylock says she generally agrees with critical judge Simon Cowell's opinions.

"From a music perspective, it is my job as a voice teacher to critique a singer and fix things," she says. "I find that Simon is right on the mark 95 percent of the time, and when you have that many people vying for positions, you have to be picky and honest."

Lachney's brother, JC Howell, is also supportive of her dreams. He remembers his baby sister as the loudest voice in the children's choir and believes her bubbly personality and vocal range will stand out.

"This is definitely a great opportunity and worth the risk," he says.

Shad Green

Shad Green, who is attending Northwest Mississippi Community College in Oxford on a choral scholarship, dreams of moving to New York to pursue a music career if *American Idol* doesn't interfere with his plans.

The 19-year-old first auditioned for the show in August 2004, joining thousands of hopefuls at the Edward Jones Dome in St. Louis. Last September, he auditioned in Memphis, and he plans to audition Aug. 14 in Atlanta.

"You know what they say," he says. "Third time is the charm."

Green stood in line 12 hours during his first audition.

"When I got there, there were literally hundreds of people laying on the concrete sleeping, packed like sardines, waiting until 6 a.m. for the line to move," he says.

The process took three days, but Green eventually found himself before the producers belting out Frank Sinatra's *Moon River*.

"My mind was so focused on my song lyrics and performance," he says. "I was prepared to give it all I had. As I got closer in line to the producers, my heart began to race, and I realized what I was doing and how big of an opportunity this was for me."

"I became nervous as ever and said a prayer to calm myself



Green



Mortimer

down. As I waited, I envisioned myself on the *American Idol* stage looking in the camera, singing my heart out to America. I was the *American Idol*."

But to Green's disappointment, the producers told him he wouldn't be going to Hollywood.

"They snipped our bracelets, and security led us back outside," he says. "It ended quicker than it started."

The audition was a learning experience for Green, who better understands the way television shows are handled.

"I came expecting to audition in front of Randy, Paula and Simon, but I learned, you had to make it past several rounds with the producers before you audition for those three," he says. "I came to the conclusion that, for TV, you had to be either very good or very bad. I also learned something about myself; I found ambition and confidence in myself that I never knew I had."

Rob Mortimer

Greenville native Rob Mortimer, 26, is a singer/songwriter who began playing guitar at age 13 and is a member of the rock band Good Paper.

His first *American Idol* audition was in Birmingham, where he didn't make it past the first round.

"When I went to Memphis last year, I knew I had to catch their eye," he says.

Realizing the need to stand out among 16,000 competitors at the FedEx Forum, Mortimer donned a black suit and tie, James Brown wig and Elvis sunglasses with attached sideburns while singing Brown's *Down and Out in New York City*.

"Unlike what you see on TV, 85 percent of the people can sing really good, so you have to do something crazy that stands out to get through there," he says. "The first thing I did was a flip."

Mortimer's decision to bend over backwards for producers enabled him to advance to the third round, where the number of competitors shrank to 44.

He says producers select songs for third-round contestants, and Mortimer was asked to sing a song he didn't lyrically know — Elvis Presley's *Burning Love*.

"I got the first two verses, and then I went blank," he says.

His performance was includ-

NEED TO KNOW

Previous *American Idol* winners

Season 1 — Kelly Clarkson

Season 2 — Ruben Studdard

Season 3 — Fantasia Barrino

Season 4 — Carrie Underwood

Season 5 — Taylor Hicks

Season 6 — Jordin Sparks

Season 7 — Could it be Dinah Lachney, Shad Green or Rob Mortimer?

Auditions for Fox40's *Idol Roadtrip4* will be held at Madison's Grandview Theatre from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday.

Finalists will travel to Charleston for the Aug. 18 *American Idol* audition.

Contestants 18-28 are invited to audition. For more information, contact Loretta Nichols Williams at (601) 922-1234.

ed in the televised *American Idol* audition clips.

"They edited the judges in on the show so it looked like they were there, but they weren't."

Mortimer's band recently submitted a performance tape for *Idol*'s new show *The Next Great American Band*, which will premiere Oct. 19, and he is planning on auditioning one last time for *American Idol* this summer, although he has yet to decide on a tryout location.

Idol minds

Lachney says she has enjoyed auditioning for *American Idol* and is always nervous until she hits the first note.

"You just have to go for it and try, because you never know what's going to happen," she says.

If the third time isn't as charming as she hopes, Lachney says she still plans to pursue a music career. She's writing an album, and her brother, a photographer and Web designer, is preparing a promotional site for Dinah Rebekah, Lachney's stage name.

Green also encourages others to pursue their dreams.

"I would encourage others to try out for things like *American Idol* because you can't make your dreams come true unless you attempt doing it," he says. "You get nowhere by just sitting around daydreaming."